

FACTS AND MYTHS

Myth: Clearcutting is the same as deforestation.

Fact: Deforestation is the permanent removal of a forest, normally for development purposes. Clearcutting followed by natural regeneration or replanting is a sustainable practice.

Myth: Clearcutting causes environmental damage.

Fact: State and federal laws are in place to protect soil and water quality during all forest harvest operations. Virginia Department of Forestry staff monitors harvest operations for compliance with these regulations.

Myth: Clearcuts are a biological desert for wildlife and plant species.

Fact: Deer, quail, fox, hawks, rabbits and many species of songbirds are just a few examples of species that rely on clearcuts for food, cover and nesting habitat. Some plant species benefit from clearcuts that provide full sunlight, which is essential for them to flower and reproduce.

Fact: Clearcutting is a useful forest management tool, but is not appropriate in every situation.

Depending on the age and size distribution of the forest, selective removal of the lower-quality trees from the stand can provide more room for the best trees to continue to grow, improving stand development and health. Some types of selective harvest are very useful for naturally regenerating a new forest.

Fact: Clearcutting often isn't pretty.

When compared to a healthy, mature forest, this can be a true statement. However, a clearcut is not a static environment and will ultimately be replaced by another aesthetic forest.

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It's Your Land – Plan for It!

Clearcutting is a major change in the forest landscape, which requires careful planning and execution. A forester can help determine if the practice is appropriate for your land.

For More Information

For more information about VDOF services or programs, please contact your local Virginia Department of Forestry office or visit www.dof.virginia.gov.



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VDOF P00202; 03/2012

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CLEARCUTTING FACTS & MYTHS

The Science Behind the Practice



Virginia Department of Forestry

www.dof.virginia.gov

History of Clearcutting

The practice of clearcutting began in the 1800s and was largely driven by economic concerns. For efficiency sake, all trees that were usable by a sawmill were cut at one time. This often led to the total exploitation of old growth forests, with no concern about protecting water quality or the environment.



In response to this unsound practice, a more common method of selective timber harvesting began in the early 1900s. This type of harvest removed only the most commercially-valuable trees in the forest, and some species might have been totally eliminated. This left trees that were suppressed, forked, crooked, diseased and genetically inferior to the trees that were removed. This poorly thought-out practice of harvesting the best trees and leaving the low-quality trees is known as a “high-grading”. This selective harvest appears to leave the forest intact, but it is actually far worse for the health of the remaining forest.

In the 1950s and 1960s, professional foresters recognized the degradation of forests that had been high-graded, and began to recommend clearcutting to address forest health concerns.

Clearcutting, followed by replanting or natural regeneration, began to be a common practice across Virginia.

Science Behind Clearcutting

As trees mature, their growth begins to slow, and trees can become more susceptible to insect and disease attack. Clearcutting, followed by prescribed reforestation, can be a sustainable way to address the management of a forest that is declining in health.

Clearcutting can help establish a forested area with a tree species that requires full sunlight to regenerate and grow well. Many species in Virginia require full sunlight to regenerate and cannot successfully grow in areas that are selectively harvested.

Shade-Intolerant Species

Loblolly pine	Shortleaf pine	Black walnut
Black locust	Cottonwood	Black cherry
Longleaf pine	Yellow-poplar	Sycamore
Willow	Butternut	Sweetgum



Benefits of Clearcutting

Forest Sustainability

With increasing demand for land from a growing population, the revenue generated from timber sales may be the only incentive for a landowner to keep the property as forestland.

Wildlife Habitat

Professional wildlife biologists have long recognized the importance of early successional habitat created by clearcutting. Certain species of wildlife depend entirely or partially on this type of habitat for survival.



Photo courtesy of Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries

Economics

Clearcutting maximizes the amount of revenue from a harvest operation by utilizing all material from the site. Modern clearcuts remove a higher percentage of merchantable wood. Valuable sawtimber used for lumber and pulpwood used for paper products are harvested, leaving the tract as clean as possible. This can minimize reforestation costs because there is less logging debris to hamper tree planting. A young stand grows faster and accumulates value at a much higher rate than an overmature forest.



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